

my mother into it too, maybe talking  
to the asparagus in the kitchen.  
anyway, we hung the photograph  
in the kitchen, had dinner,  
after which we watched  
a documentary on coney island.  
my older sister called from  
north carolina, wishing my father  
a happy father's day; my  
younger sister had called from  
jersey before i had arrived.  
my mother had made lasagna.  
it was his day,  
and it was what  
he had wanted.

### BLACK WALNUT TREES

my father gave me some black walnut trees,  
little things, about two, three inches in height,  
to plant around the farmhouse here. every so often  
he'll find one growing in or around his garden.  
sometime back he was visiting a friend in jersey  
and this man gave my father a bunch of black walnuts  
from a tree he had growing in his yard.  
my father brought them home, but my mother threw  
them out on my father's compost pile, in  
defeat, not being able to open them up  
easily enough. eventually, after the compost  
was put to use, these black walnut trees  
started shooting up everywhere. today  
he pulled one out of the ground to show me.  
and the walnut itself was still there,  
black and split open, the little tree being  
nourished by the meat of the nut.  
so, tomorrow i am going to plant these trees,  
after talking to the landlord to see  
where he might like them put.  
when my father was standing there,  
in his garden, holding up the little tree,  
the walnut dangling from its roots,  
i couldn't help noticing how incredibly  
thin he has grown. he talked about  
his friend, the one who had given him  
the black walnuts, saying that he had died  
some months ago from a stroke. before  
today i had never known such a tree even existed.  
i put the trees he had given me  
on the floor of the car by the back seat,  
each tree potted in its own paper cup.  
other plants were there too; i forget  
their names. and in a bucket of water



there were some tall wildflowers, a huge  
batch of them gladly gotten rid of  
by my father. i take all these  
unwanted trees and flowers.

i'll stick them in the ground and  
if they live they live, and if they  
die they die. only thing is, with the  
walnut trees: i don't see myself  
being around long enough  
to witness them ever  
maturing into anything  
meaningful.

#### ONLY FOR THE OLD AND THE FRAGILE

i don't know why i want to live to be an old man.  
but i find that i do. it seems odd to me, when i  
really think about it. there isn't much that  
i want to accomplish. no major goals have made  
themselves known to me. i can't see my lazy self  
solving any of the serious problems facing this race  
of humans i've somehow become a part of.  
that sounds condescending, and i am sorry.  
i want to love another woman, create more of  
these poems and like some other poets i know  
drink many more glasses of wine.  
at the end of it all dying a gracious death  
might prove to be a worthwhile act.  
and just once i would like to be able to  
charm the birds out of the trees.  
i've heard it said that certain people can do this,  
and these people are spoken of with very  
noticeable envy. it'd be nice to convince  
a good number of birds to come down  
and land on my shoulders. if i were an  
old man i would be thin and light  
and these birds could pick me up and  
carry me away. they would also be kind  
enough to pick my wife up also.  
we would float comfortably about in  
the air like people in a painting  
by chagall. this would be something  
to live to be an old man for.  
i have no desire to accumulate  
wealth, and fame is completely out  
of the question.  
just to be held aloft  
by the birds would be plenty.  
birds only do this  
for the old  
and the fragile.

— Ronald Baatz

Mt. Tremper NY